remote | greenhouse

How to improve the life-work balance of your employees

Global HR experts from Greenhouse and Remote share practical strategies to help you support your team.

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How many times have you seen this: a team member sets an out of office message on their work email and dips offline for a moment.

But they don't actually stop working.

You see them responding to messages on the weekend, during their vacation, or when they're sick. The struggle to disconnect — genuinely disconnect — is one of the biggest challenges in a remote-first world, but that doesn't mean we should continue to blur the line between work time and off time.

Technology has broken down the barriers between work and personal life. This is especially true for remote teams, where workers often don't have a commute (or sometimes even a separate office space) to maintain the necessary separation that previous generations took for granted.

Feeling online and available all the time is counterproductive for both the individual and for the business. When workers never let themselves unplug and relax, they become stressed, upset, and burned out. Reliance on this synchronous work style also leads to practices and workflows that are harder to scale.

Companies owe it to their people (and to their staff retention rates) to promote better work-life balance, but that can be a tough task even for in-person teams.

Both Greenhouse and Remote are passionate about fostering a workplace culture that encourages life-work balance for all team members. This intention is supported by specific programs that we want to share with you.

With the help of expert advice from the global HR leaders at Greenhouse and Remote, you can use this guide to better motivate, support, and retain your team.

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What is life-work balance?

Life-work balance describes the equilibrium between the demands of work and the activities that make up the rest of our lives. However, psychology tells us that "work" doesn't always mean working for income — it may also include other kinds of work, such as caring for family members, maintaining a household, or performing other essential duties.

In other words, life-work balance is not about splitting your time 50-50 between work and non-work. It's a comfortable balance between the things a person needs to do and the things they want to do.

On a Greenhouse panel, Glassdoor's global director of talent acquisition, Amy Farrar, noted that Glassdoor has seen a shift since the COVID-19 pandemic in how people define the lines between work and non-work. "We're really focusing on balance," says Farrar. "Striving to work to live and not live to work. The pandemic has taught us those lessons."

It's important to note that the pandemic did not create a new need for life-work balance. Rather, the disruption to standard procedure allowed people to evaluate their current balance and identify areas where they wanted changes.

There's more to life than work, and both Remote and Greenhouse share the belief that your life should always come first. That's why when we discuss this topic we use the term **life-work balance** rather than work-life balance (as you'll see in the title of this guide). It's our way of challenging unhealthy attitudes towards work and reframing the conversation.

Why should you help nurture life-work balance for your employees?

Work is a leading cause of stress for just about everyone. Research on the subject spans the globe. More than one in four workers in the European Union are affected by stress. Job-related stress is the top cause of stress in the United States, and 21% of all Australian workers have taken time off work in the last year because of stress.

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Yet work tends to take over workers' lives, and if you're not careful, that stress can be made worse by remote work. When you work from home, the line between work and personal time can start to blur thanks to technology and uncertain working hours. It can be tempting to keep working when someone on your team is always online, even if it's past time for you to log off.

Just because workers can work at all hours doesn't mean they should. Teams with remote workers should start to move away from traditional notions of work-life balance and begin to consider a future that focuses on life first and work second. When life comes first, you and your team can get more from all the hours in life — whether at the office, relaxing at home, or somewhere in between.

Learn how Remote's team improve life-work balance for their teams in this dedicated on-demand webinar
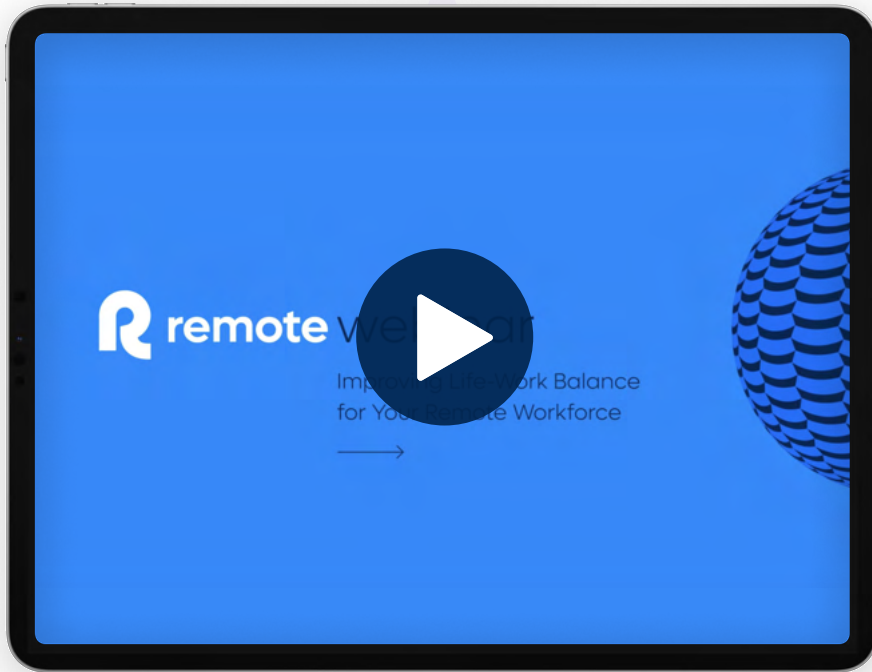
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What are practical ways to improve life-work balance?

There are many ways to encourage time off and life-work balance to ensure that your remote team is being inclusive and provides opportunities for people to prioritize their life-work balance.

Keah Nguyen, a member of Remote's international People team, is passionate about creating life-work balance for herself and for others working remotely. She offers some helpful advice to managers who are committed to improving the balance of their team members.

01 **Build life-work integration instead of work-life balance**

"We advocate for life-work balance. We want everyone to have great lives, with a life outside of work, and not just great work lives," says Nguyen. "Work-life integration is not something that we encourage, especially in a remote-first environment when it can be difficult to switch off when you are working from home with colleagues in all different time zones."

02 **Set up obstacles between yourself and your work.**

To set up a strong life-work culture, says Nguyen, set clear boundaries between work and personal time. For example, Remote encourages its employees not to have work apps on their phones and to master the art of working asynchronously. By switching to async workflows, team members can work at the hours that are best for them — and not during hours they would rather be doing something else.

03 Use documentation as a tool for transparency.

For boundaries to work well, it's critical that your team knows when everyone is or is not working. Ngyuen says her team optimizes their calendars to be transparent about when they are working while using Slack to update statuses when needed.

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We also utilize status updates where we can clearly see whether someone is OOO, if they are away from the keyboard, or working asynchronously for a whole day. My colleagues will often set their Slack status to "walking my dog," "having lunch," "working out," or "done for the day," for example, which not only communicates when someone is unavailable but also helps demonstrate that we are not an "always on" work environment.

KEAH NGUYEN
Senior People Specialist

READ   Learn more strategies to help you support the mental health of your remote team members!

How do you monitor the life-work balance of your team members?

Keeping an eye on the life-work balance of employees can be tough when you're actually in the office with them, so it can be twice as difficult when you all work remotely. Without physical proximity as a crutch, it can be tough to spot whether someone is having a hard time or is spending too many hours at their desk.

In its 2021 Employer Hiring Sentiment Report, Greenhouse found that 53% of employers expect a desire for better life-work balance will be the primary cause of employee turnover. Employees often don't want to leave, but if they feel forced to choose between living a full life and keeping a job, they will explore new opportunities to see if a new job will offer better balance.

Ngyuen suggests that HR managers use analytics and reporting to understand which employees might be burning the midnight oil.

"We have an automated and live report anyone at Remote can access at any time to look at the average number of time off days taken by department, by team, and organization-wide," she said. "Anyone can query this data to show the average number of time off days taken over any period of time. This level of transparency helps leaders as well as individual team members normalize taking time off and encourage conversations about this topic."

Another way of understanding time off and overwork on remote teams is through tools like surveys. Remote uses a semiannual engagement survey to gather data about the well-being of employees. Questions like, "After work, I have energy for my leisure activities, friends and family." or, "I feel comfortable taking personal time off in my team." gauge the mental health of team members and kickstart conversations with leaders about life-work balance among staff members.

> 📖 **READ** [How do you manage an unlimited PTO policy?](#)

What are the early signs of burnout or imbalance?

Burnout is a state of exhaustion caused by a prolonged period of stress. Not only is burnout bad for performance, but it can also lead to serious health issues, including depression and anxiety.

It can be hard to spot burnout before a team member reaches the tipping point, but there are several signs a team member isn't doing well:

Poor work performance: It's tough to be innovative when you're exhausted. If one of your star team members is suddenly making a lot of mistakes, showing up late for team meetings, or is clearly having a tough time being creative or keeping up with responsibilities, this is a sign of burnout.

Exhaustion: Is a team member always sick? Do they seem constantly drained and unhappy? They may even complain of constant pain or fatigue. Physical ailments like these can also be a sign of burnout.

Alienation from the team: If a previously friendly worker has become cynical, disengaged, or frustrated, this can also be a sign of burnout. Look for team members who have started withdrawing, or who are acting numb, sad, or angry. They may need help but not know how to ask for it.

READ   How to reduce stress for remote teams

How do you make it okay for employees to speak up and ask for help?

When employees are burned out, they're already isolated and may have trouble advocating for themselves. They may have also worked in organizations where admitting difficulty leads to punishment instead of assistance and understanding.

Colm O'Cuinneain, general manager of EMEA at Greenhouse, encourages employers to create environments in which employees can advocate for themselves regardless of whether they work remotely or in the office.

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Have meeting norms so that everyone feels included. Be thoughtful about the experience for people in the room and outside the room.

COLM O'CUINNEAIN
General Manager EMEA & Global
Talent Maker at Greenhouse

At companies with great work-life integration, people feel comfortable stepping forward and asking for help once they become overwhelmed. When people struggle in silence, a manager needs to step in and check on those team members to provide them with the time, resources, and support they need to feel like themselves again.

"It took us about 200 years to build up to the motion of working in an office," says O'Cuinneain. "We've only been at this for just about two years now. There's more work to be done."

[First-time remote managers](#) may not always know how to spot an employee who needs proactive support. The best way to encourage employees to speak up about needing help is for managers and senior leaders at the organization to be transparent about their own life-work balance practices. When employees see leaders at the company doing things like taking mental health days, they feel more comfortable doing the same.

What checks can you put in place to avoid overwork and burnout?

It's not enough to offer unlimited paid time off to your employees. In fact, paid time off can have unintended consequences, like people taking less time off than they would with a set number of days.

Remote's VP of People, Nadia Vatilidis, recommends creating an unlimited PTO policy with a minimum to ensure employees actually take time off. "Each employee has a set amount of deliverables and responsibilities and should feel free to take time off and recharge, so long as they are able to deliver their results," says Vatilidis. "Setting a minimum of PTO days each year will doubly ensure people take PTO when needed and not put it off."

If workers are burning out or overworking while management is giving lip service to the idea of life-work balance, the consequences can include burnout for workers and damage to the company's culture.
Set actionable protections against employee overwork and burnout in policy form to keep your people happy and healthy.

- **Minimum days off:** A company might require workers to take a minimum of 20 days off a year. That means managers and HR need to monitor the time that's being taken off and actively approach workers who aren't taking enough time. You can also use a tool like Slackbot to remind team members to take their time.

- **Regular manager check-ins:** Managers should check in on their team members' workload, life outside of work, and their health and wellbeing regularly. By making 1:1 meetings about the person, not the work, you can encourage trust and balance. Do the work asynchronously so you can spend the synchronous meetings on personal wellness.

☑ **No manager approvals:** Consider a policy that does away with manager approval for time off. As long as the worker ensures their work is covered while they're gone and the workload is managed within the team, it shouldn't fall to the manager to judge whether time off is acceptable.

☆ **Offer days off before your team needs them:** You don't need to have a holiday to take time off. If your team seems stressed, give them a day off. Remote, for example, offers a company-sponsored self-care day every quarter. This day, which Nguyen says came about during the pandemic when employees started burning out, is a day off for everyone.

🖨 **Offer resources:** Just as health plans are important for your employees' physical health, it's important to offer resources that help with mental health. There are many tools and services available that can help improve mental health or offer therapy, such as Modern Health.

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When you find that people are overtired, overworked or just need a break — give them that break. Take their work/worries away and let them take off. Don't postpone this, do it right away. Rest is essential.

JOB VAN DER VOORT
Remote Co-founder and CEO

How can employees improve their own life-work balance?

Employees, of course, have to take responsibility for their own life-work balance and mental health. While there are many ways to achieve life-work balance, there are a couple of important steps your team members can take to prevent overwork.

- ☐ **Plan time off:** If you don't plan your vacations and days off, you're unlikely to use it. According to the [State of American Vacation](#) study conducted by the U.S. Travel Association, 52% of employees reported having unused vacation days left over at the end of the year. By planning time off, you can make sure you actually use the time allotted to you.

- ☐ **Don't work when you're sick:** You might be home, but that doesn't mean you should work from bed. When you're sick, your body needs rest. Listen to it. Have fun: When you're not working, make time to do things you enjoy. Spend time alone and with loved ones. If you don't have things to look forward to outside of work, use some of your time to try new things and explore more possibilities.

- ☐ **Unplug:** At the end of the day, get off your devices. If you're not near your email, you won't be tempted to look at work messages. Remote's CEO Job van der Voort has all the lights in his office set to turn off at a certain time as a reminder not to work too late.

- ☐ **Decide what life-work balance looks like for you:** There's no such thing as a perfect life-work balance for everyone. Sometimes work will eat up more time than it should. Sometimes life will need all your attention. Accept that it will change, but decide what your ideal balance is and give yourself the space to pursue it.
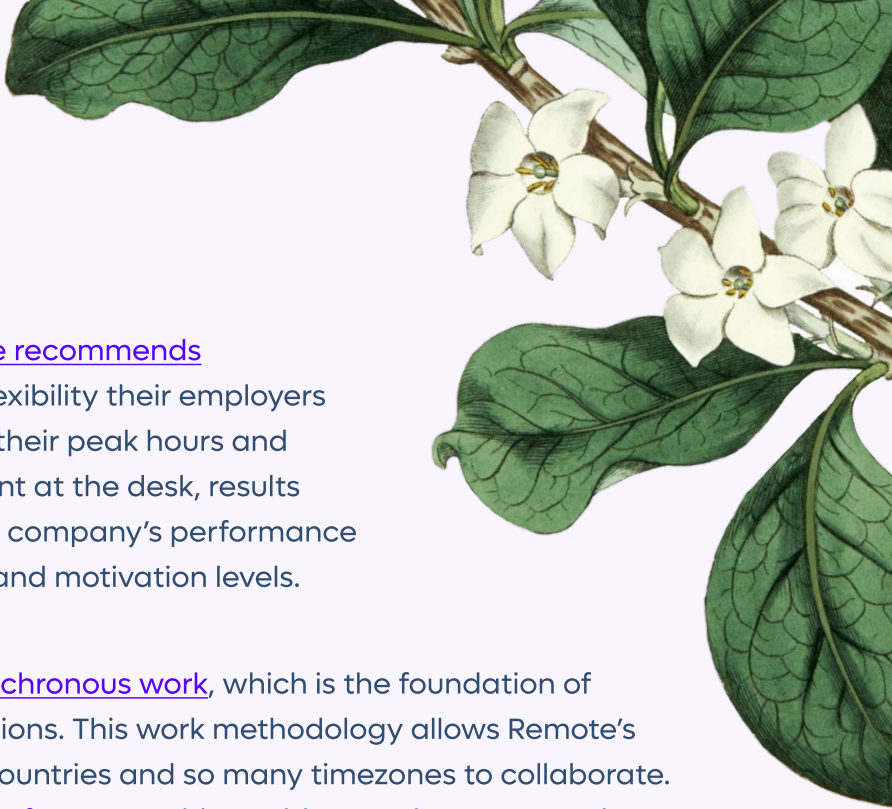
In addition to these tips, Greenhouse recommends employees take advantage of the flexibility their employers offer. When employees can work at their peak hours and focus on results instead of hours spent at the desk, results speak for themselves — both for the company's performance and for the employee's satisfaction and motivation levels.

This is the core concept behind asynchronous work, which is the foundation of Remote's internal day-to-day operations. This work methodology allows Remote's global team spread across over 70 countries and so many timezones to collaborate. Async work is woven into the culture of Remote. This enables employees to work during hours that suit their own individual lifestyle, while still maximizing the productivity and output of the business.

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Use async work practices to help you team work when they want.

In asynchronous work, communication is not expected to be immediate, meaning a globally distributed team of workers can fine-tune work on their own time to reduce pressure on themselves and their colleagues. When you work asynchronously, individuals can maximize their productivity without waiting for others to complete tasks.

The flexibility, trust, and autonomy provided by async work gives your team members the keys to improve their own life-work balance.

The foundation of asynchronous work is creating processes that allow employees to work autonomously. This gives employees the trust they need to manage their own work schedule. Remote's dedicated guide to working asynchronously walks you through the methodology in detail.

Async work is a way to organize how to get stuff done with less interruptions and higher efficiency based on a few ideas:

- Async work should be used more often than sync work – and not just to foster healthier life-work balance. This style of work provides better resource management, reduces waste, and helps to optimize productivity.

- Asynchronous communication empowers independence. It focuses on making sure that a task and its effects are independent of whoever planned or executed it. Good documentation, written procedures, defaulting to messaging over calls, and respect for interruption-free work slots all build a culture of consideration.

- Minimize meetings and instant communication as much as possible. Keeping this as a rule of thumb allows people to focus on their tasks with less distraction. Your team can concentrate on best practices like documentation and writing proper procedures rather than feeling the pressure of an 'always on' mentality.

- Always defaulting to action (within reason) helps the whole team move faster, reduce wasteful times and increase ownership.

Want to learn more about the way Remote works asynchronously to run meetings, share information, and document progress? Curious about our hiring process, inclusion and diversity efforts, how we onboard new hires, and the PTO and benefits we offer? You can read about all of this in detail in Remote's publicly available <u>employee handbook.</u>

READ   <u>Employee Remote Handbook</u>

How can you generate buy-in from leadership for life-work balance?

Of course, it's difficult to set up any sort of a company culture or program without buy-in from the top, and getting that buy-in can be tricky.

Company leaders need to understand why being a champion for life-work balance is so important. Remote recommends leaders take time off themselves — publicly and without constant check-ins — to encourage other employees to do the same:

"Great life-work balance on remote teams starts with leaders who do not publicly work themselves to the bone all day, every day. While holding executive positions often demands long hours, especially at startups, leaders cannot allow team members to perceive overwork as the norm."

Aligning programs with company values can also help leadership gain clarity on the importance of life-work balance. Ngyuen advises HR teams to point to the bottom-line value of wellness programs.

"Be thoughtful and clear on how an initiative may benefit the business (productivity, engagement, performance, customer and employee advocacy) and the impact of not having a program on the business (attrition, burnout)," she said. "When we are implementing something as a result of a trend or theme we have noticed in a company-wide engagement survey, being clear on the root causes and benefits might be helpful in a business case."

READ   Elements of a sustainable remote work culture

How can better life-work balance for your team help your company grow?

Putting in the work to create better life-work balance for your team isn't just the right thing to do: it's also the smart thing to do. Teams with better life-work balance enjoy better retention, higher productivity, stronger cohesion, and sharper creativity. When you build a team like that, great talent outside your company can't help but notice — and many of them will want to join you.

How do you leverage life-work balance to add great new talent and retain the talent you have? First, by following the advice in this guide to create a sustainable culture where life-work balance can thrive. Second, by accessing all the talent the world has to offer and using Greenhouse and Remote to find, hire, onboard, and pay your international team.

greenhouse

Greenhouse is the market leader in applicant tracking and recruiting software. With Greenhouse's easy-to-use tools, you can accelerate your hiring process, find great talent to fill open roles, and optimize your recruiting workflow to ensure everyone receives an equitable, enjoyable experience with your company.

remote

Once you find the right candidate, Remote makes it easy to onboard and pay your international employees. Remote handles international payroll, benefits, taxes, compliance, and even stock options for your team, all through one streamlined platform. With Remote, you can expand your candidate search to more than 60 countries while maintaining the same high standards for benefits and employee experience that your local team members enjoy.

There's more good news: Greenhouse and Remote have integrated their solutions to bring the power of industry-leading recruiting and global HR together. With Greenhouse and Remote combined, you can supercharge your global hiring stack to provide your growing global team with an unmatched experience.

The talent of the world is at your fingertips. Where that talent takes your business next is up to you.

Expand your global team with peace of mind

Remote does not only understand the need to protect your sensitive data and intellectual property — we act on it. As the leaders in international employment, we offer the highest levels of IP and data protection for your growing global team. No one else can offer you the security, confidence, and care that Remote does.
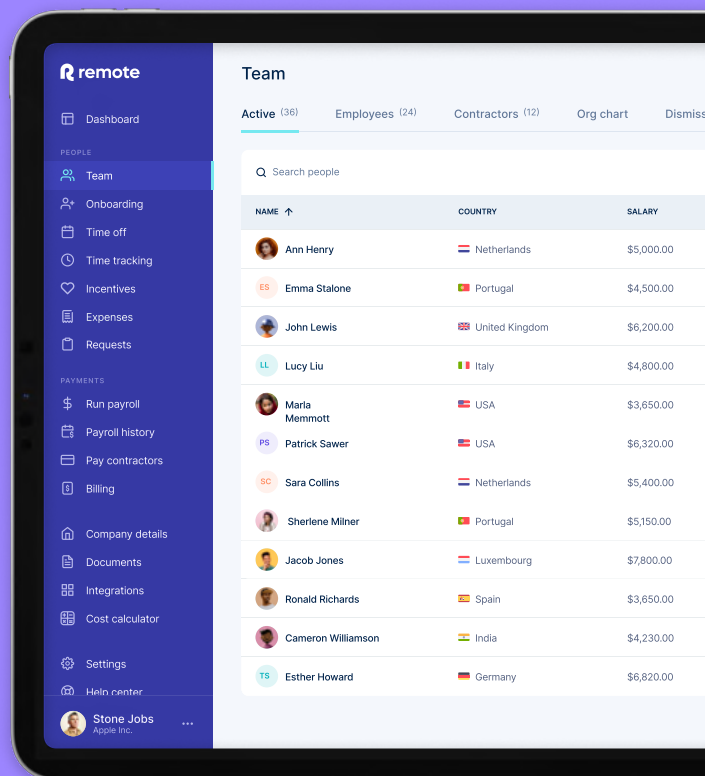
While it's important to protect your business, you should not let the risks outlined here prevent you from expanding your team into new countries. Global talent can accelerate your business and help you achieve your goals in record time. With Remote, you can grow and hire internationally with confidence.

Learn more about how to employ internationally with confidence at Remote.com

Simplify your onboarding with Remote

Manage your global team with Remote to onboard and pay your new starters with ease.

GET STARTED NOW

NAME ↑	COUNTRY	SALARY
Ann Henry	Netherlands	$5,000.00
Emma Stalone	Portugal	$4,500.00
John Lewis	United Kingdom	$6,200.00
Lucy Liu	Italy	$4,800.00
Marla Memmott	USA	$3,650.00
Patrick Sawer	USA	$6,320.00
Sara Collins	Netherlands	$5,400.00
Sherlene Milner	Portugal	$5,150.00
Jacob Jones	Luxembourg	$7,800.00
Ronald Richards	Spain	$3,650.00
Cameron Williamson	India	$4,230.00
Esther Howard	Germany	$6,820.00